



## OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

14 September 2020

To: Priests, Deacons and Lay Ecclesial Ministers in the Diocese of London

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

When I called the Episcopal Council together for a teleconference last Thursday, 9 September, I asked that they bring to our meeting any concerns from our parishes, especially with respect to the directives for using our churches. One theme that presented itself again and again was the fatigue that was settling in around all the restrictions placed upon parishes. This fatigue is felt by members of pastoral teams and parishioners alike, especially the volunteers who are assisting with registering people for Mass and cleaning our churches.

### **A Word of Thanks to All of You**

I would like to thank all who have worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic to continue various forms of pastoral ministry and outreach to the people of our Diocese. The fatigue is affecting us all, but in different and creative ways you have been “the face of the Church” when communities were prevented from gathering, and even now when so many are unable yet to come to our churches to gather with their sisters and brothers.

I know you are doing a lot of work to reschedule celebrations of the sacraments of initiation. I have heard many stories of the support that our parishioners have experienced and of gratitude for their continuing connection with their parishes. Members of pastoral teams have made contact by telephone, email, and through online presentations of Masses, liturgies, reflections, devotions and other prayers. You have truly impacted so many who were or still are confined to their homes.

Our parishes are offering online: *lectio divina*, daily family rosary, “children’s church”, cooking shows and interviews with local parishioners and community members. They are having virtual gatherings: for Alpha groups, bible studies, small faith sharing groups, sacramental preparation. They are feeding the hungry by providing meals outside. Members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul continue to serve those in need. Development and Peace groups have been meeting online to promote the year of *Laudato si’*. Many of you have helped family members when a loved one died, and when no Funeral Mass was possible, you still ministered to them in their grief.

From this list and from many other good works that our parishes are doing, we have “portraits” of how we truly are a church sent forth to proclaim the word of God, to celebrate the sacraments and to exercise the ministry of charity and justice. May God bless all your efforts to bring his love to others!

## The Need for Vigilance

The best minds around the world are also working tirelessly to find a vaccine that will fight the novel coronavirus. Scientists and medical personnel are discovering ways we can limit the spread of the virus, with the hope of one day finally eliminating it. That day, however, is still far off. It is widely thought, without knowing for certain, that the pandemic will be with us at least until the end of 2021, if not continuing into 2022. We need to realize that it is not going to be gone soon, and we need to be vigilant to continue doing everything we can to limit the spread of the virus and keep our churches open.

This means we have to hold the line on all possible precautions that have been put in place, from physical distancing, to wearing masks or other personal protective equipment, to limiting the size of gatherings. It means that all the directives put in place for the safe return to our worship spaces must be followed strictly. We cannot relax our efforts; we cannot take shortcuts. All must be able to feel safe when coming to our churches, with firm knowledge that we are following proper protocols. These are matters of life and death!

A recent *London Free Press* (5 September) article about the virus, quoted a family doctor from Perth, Ontario, Alan Drummond, who also works in that city's hospital Emergency Ward. Dr. Drummond specifically addressed those who consider the virus a hoax or the vehicle of some conspiracy. His words, I think, are helpful to all of us, especially those of us feeling the fatigue I mentioned earlier: "Our view has always been, look, better to be over-prepared than ill-prepared. If, with the passage of time and judgment of history, it's deemed we over-reacted, fine. I would far prefer that than to not have reacted appropriately at all."

Life as we know it will be different for quite a long time, and we need to be prepared for the long haul. I want to encourage you to remain vigilant and strong spiritually as you continue your ministry among the people of our Diocese. I need you to be signs of strength for others, especially in the face of the fatigue and for any who are feeling stress, anxiety, depression, loneliness and isolation. I need you to continue to encourage the faithful so that no one can think that God has abandoned us or that hope is lost. We need to encourage continuing acts of charity over selfishness, of hope over despair, of faith over doubt. St. Peter had great words for his community, as found in his first letter, that are appropriate for us as leaders in faith: "Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you" (3:15).

With Bishop Joseph, I want to express our gratitude and assure you of our prayers for your ministry, your health and your safety. Please extend our words of gratitude to your parishioners for their works of justice and charity in your communities, and assure them of our prayers.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Most Rev. Ronald P. Fabbro, C.S.B.  
Bishop of London

